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## ABSTRACT

After completing one semester at Harcum Junior college, 272 freshmen (73 percent of the total class) responded to an anonymous questionnaire designed to identify areas in which they believed that their high school preparation had been insufficient to enable them to cope with college study and living, and to understand their own motivations and aspirations. The survey instrument involved a priority ranking of 19 needs in three general areas: educational information, psycho-social information, and vocational information. An open-ended question was also included. Among the five strongest needs expressed, four were in the educational information category, including reading skills, studying for exams, preparing bibliographies, and math skills and concepts. Improving motivation was also in the top five, a psycho-social information item, but obviously related to academic matters. Insufficient preparation in various academic skills areas was the most frequently mentioned deficiency mentioned by the respondents. vocational information deficiencies followed closely, and the least expressed concerns were the items in the psycho-social information areas. The survey instrument is appended, and a list of some of the open-ended comments is provided. (NHM)

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Office of Research  
IRR 76-7

## HARCUM JUNIOR COLLEGE

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(VI)

Harcum Freshmen Self-Evaluate  
Their Preparation for College

1. The quality and depth of high school preparation for college involves many dimensions of student coping behavior. The practical implications are obvious; therefore current Harcum freshmen were invited to assess the quality of their preparation. After completing one full semester of college some 272 freshmen (73% of the total class) responded, anonymously, to a questionnaire. It was designed to elicit information to answer the question - "In which areas do they believe they need help before entering college in order to cope more effectively with the real dimensions of college study and living, as well as being better able to understand their own motivations and aspirations?"
2. Pinpointing those areas which, in their collective views, represent the skills and knowledge most frequently considered to be deficient, is the first practical step in identifying specific areas which should receive greater future attention. Quite obviously, their answers also have great significance, both for teaching and guidance personnel at the College and their high-school counterparts.
3. The reasons for failure of students to satisfactorily achieve their collegiate aspirations are many and varied. Some obviously devolve upon the student; others are more appropriately ascribed to the college learning environment. Both, however, share a common characteristic: in varying degrees they are subject to change and modification.
4. Those assigned the responsibility for educational/student life decision-making are the accountable individuals who must determine what shall be done to 'close' such preparation gaps. In addition, they must also make another very practical decision - what shall be the order of priority followed in seeking to modify a variety of existing conditions and practices? Some of the major factors to consider are: (1) student lack of adequate subject-matter preparation; (2) student lack of motivation to study and learn; (3) student personal adjustment and emotional problems; (4) student lack of realism about college 'life', both academic and non-academic; (5) student financial aid problems.
5. Both the two-year college and the secondary school jointly share a heavy responsibility to keep the content of their academic programming pertinent and timely for effective student preparation - be the goal ultimate transfer to baccalaureate-level schooling, or skills, knowledge, and attitudes preparation of their graduates for entry-level positions in the world of work. Effective articulation into the next phase of living is still the primary objective to be accomplished! The views of the students themselves are certainly most germane in seeking to identify conditions of maximum effectiveness in secondary school preparation for college.

6. The Student Educational Questionnaire (see Appendix) is the instrument utilized in this inquiry. It was designed by Thomas R. Coleman in 1974 in connection with a practicum submitted to Nova University in partial fulfillment of requirements for a Doctor of Education degree. The questionnaire was administered to Harcum freshmen in February 1976 as a structured and standardized method for determining their self-evaluated assessment of quality of their high school preparation for attendance at Harcum Junior College.

7. This questionnaire instrument explores three general categories. These include: items 1 through 9 = Educational Information; questions 10 through 15 = Psycho-social Information; questions 16 through 19 = Vocational Information. Therefore, by this structuring the responses of these students immediately identifies those specific dimensions in which they believe they need assistance (or counseling). An open-ended question is also included. Students could respond freely and write in other areas in which they believed they were ill-prepared to cope upon entering college. Summaries of their responses to the 20 questionnaire items are discussed in the following paragraphs.

8. The group-assessed strength of need for each questionnaire item is determined as follows. A numerical 'score' of 1 is assigned for each "Least" assessment-rating; 2 for each "Some" assessment, and 3 for each "Most" assessment. Therefore, the degree, or strength, of group-assessed need may be conveniently expressed as a percentage of the maximum 'score' for any item. This would be  $3 \times 272$  (respondents) or 816. The group-determined priority ranking (or 'strengths') of assessed needs is listed, in descending order of need strength, in the following table. (All percentages are rounded-off to the nearest whole number. The capital letters in parentheses following the percentage figures indicates whether the item is in:

- Group A - Educational Information items
- B - Vocational Information items
- C - Psycho-social Information items

Table 1:- Priority Ranking of Group-assessed Needs

1. Reading Skills = 69% (A)
2. Studying for an exam = 67% (A)
3. Improving my motivation = 64% (C)
4. Preparing a bibliography = 62% (A)
5. Math skills and concepts = 61% (A)
6. Selection of goals for when I leave Harcum = 60% (B)
7. Obtaining financial aid = 59% (A)
8. Selection of schools, vocations, and other opportunities after I left high school = 58% (B)
9. Organizing and budgeting time in order to meet school deadlines = 56% (A)
10. Awareness of extracurricular activities = 55% (C)
11. Selection of courses appropriate for me = 54% (B)
12. Notetaking = 53% (A)
13. Gaining the proper information regarding admissions exams and applications = 52% (A)
14. Identifying my interest areas = 50% (B)
15. Helping me cope with failure = 49% (C)
16. Helping me get along with teachers and meeting their expectations and demands = 46% (C)
17. Preparing term or research papers = 45% (A)
18. Helping me with my social interactions with peers = 44% (C)
19. Helping me with my personal problems and social adjustments = 40% (C)

9. Analysis-evaluation of the above tabulation reveals:

(1) Among the 5 strongest needs expressed, 4 are in the Educational Information category: Reading skills - greatest need or 'preparation-gap' indicated; Studying for an exam - 2nd; Preparing a bibliography - 4th; and Math Skills and concepts - 5th.

(2) The only non-Educational Information category included in the top-5 is "Improving my motivation" - a Psycho-social Information item. In a sense, this item too is closely related, for although not stated, a reasonable inference is that the motivation relates to studying, learning, and matters 'academic'.

(3) If the percentage 'strengths' of these 19 student-assessed needs are averaged for each of the three major categories, the following applies:

A - Educational Information = 58% average  
(questions 1-9)

B - Vocational Information = 56% average  
(questions 16-19)

C - Psycho-social Information = 50% average  
(questions 10-15)

10. Write-in comments in item 20 included the following: these are, indeed, thought-provoking!

1- English which is taught in high school, my high school - has not prepared me for College English composition.

2- The areas I had the most trouble with were budgeting time and motivation. These are still the biggest problems.

3- I believe my high school could have offered a mini-course for pre-medical students, to learn common terms and medical terminology that would help my adjusting to Harcum.

4- When I entered college I pictured it 'fun and games'. I think it should be clear to students what college is all about before they enter!

5- Trying to understand the reasoning behind taking unrelated courses to my major.

6- The amount of work. In high school you had homework, but I think it wasn't enough to prepare you for college. I'm just starting to really work.

7- Partying life. Can't get up in the morning in time for class.

8- Entering my major I had no kind of experience, and it affected my grades -whereas those who had experience did much better.

9- Sometimes I have problems getting along with my peers.

10- More useful guidance programs in high schools!

11- Doing term papers.

12- Dorm life: what it's like. Knowing which vocation is the best for me, because we were not told about all of them. There are some fields which I never knew I could go to college for.

13- My major, that's why I switched. I had Interior Design, but I did not have any knowledge of any of the skills I needed.

14- Living with 200-300 girls in a dorm. No car.

11. Several general conclusions are suggested by the results of this questionnaire inquiry:
- (1) Preparation in various academic 'skills' areas is very clearly foremost in the 'preparation-gap' needs perceived by these Harcum freshmen.
  - (2) Following closely are the Vocational Information needs, and the least-expressed 'concerns' were the items in the Psycho-social Information areas.
  - (3) Among this group of students, the intensity level of these felt needs is quite 'high', when expressed as a proportion of the maximum possible score (i. e., a score of 3, times 272 respondents). The very 'least' degree of concern expressed was 40% (item 19, Table 1); the greatest concern was 69% (item 1, Table 1). In only 4 of the 19 questionnaire items was **less** than 50% 'strength' of need expressed. In the remaining 15 items a 'high' level of 50% to 69% was indicated.
  - (4) These Harcum freshmen express strong levels of concern about various dimensions of their academic preparation for Harcum programs of study. Do these 'preparation gaps' result from student 'failures' to learn? teacher 'failures' to teach? a combination of both factors? Whatever the causes, this questionnaire survey reveals some serious 'preparation gaps', as perceived by current Harcum freshmen.
12. The extent to which the results reported in this document may be generalized beyond Harcum is a matter best answered by replication of the questionnaire query among other samples of freshmen students.

Boris Blai, Jr. Ed. D.  
Director of Research

March 1976

# HARCUM JUNIOR COLLEGE

## Office of Research

### Student Educational Questionnaire

This brief questionnaire invites your considered views. It is not a test. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers! It is a completely confidential survey of the opinions of Harcum freshman as a group: do not sign your name.

Thank you for your serious and helpful cooperation.

February 1976

Boris Blai, Jr., Ed. D.  
Director of Research

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#### Directions:-

Please circle the number which you believe best defines your needs BEFORE entering college.

- 1- refers to NEEDING THE LEAST help in that area
- 2- refers to NEEDING SOME help in that area
- 3- refers to NEEDING THE MOST help in that area

Just before entering college, I believe I needed help in the following areas:

|                                                                               | <u>Least</u> | <u>Some</u> | <u>Most</u> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. notetaking                                                                 | 1            | 2           | 3           |
| 2. preparing term or research paper                                           | 1            | 2           | 3           |
| 3. preparing a bibliography                                                   | 1            | 2           | 3           |
| 4. studying for an exam                                                       | 1            | 2           | 3           |
| 5. reading skills                                                             | 1            | 2           | 3           |
| 6. math skills & concepts                                                     | 1            | 2           | 3           |
| 7. organizing & budgeting time in order to meet school deadlines              | 1            | 2           | 3           |
| 8. obtaining financial aid                                                    | 1            | 2           | 3           |
| 9. gaining the proper information regarding admissions exams and applications | 1            | 2           | 3           |
| 10. improving my motivation                                                   | 1            | 2           | 3           |

|                                                                                      | <u>Least</u> | <u>Some</u> | <u>Most</u> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| 11. helping me with my personal problems and social adjustments                      | 1            | 2           | 3           |
| 12. helping me with my social interactions with peers                                | 1            | 2           | 3           |
| 13. helping me to get along with teachers and meeting their expectations & demands   | 1            | 2           | 3           |
| 14. helping me cope with failure                                                     | 1            | 2           | 3           |
| 15. awareness of extracurricular activities                                          | 1            | 2           | 3           |
| 16. selection of courses appropriate for me                                          | 1            | 2           | 3           |
| 17. identifying my interest areas                                                    | 1            | 2           | 3           |
| 18. selection of goals for when I leave Harcum                                       | 1            | 2           | 3           |
| 19. selection of schools, vocations and other opportunities after I left high school | 1            | 2           | 3           |

20. Are there any other areas in which you believe you were ill-prepared to cope when you entered college? Please name and comment upon them here.

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Your cooperation is sincerely appreciated.